

Advent 2

Matthew 3:1-12 New Living Translation (NLT)

**3** In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, <sup>2</sup>“Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” <sup>3</sup>The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming! Clear the road for him!’”

<sup>4</sup>John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John.<sup>6</sup> And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

<sup>7</sup>But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup>Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. <sup>9</sup>Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. <sup>10</sup>Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>11</sup>“I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>12</sup>He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.” (Matthew 3:1-12 NLT)

The Word of God for the People of God

**THANKS BE TO GOD!**

“Turn”  
12.4.16

Opening remarks

Scripture - Matthew 3.1-12

John the Baptist was a fiery prophet who came to the wilderness with a message of repentance: “REPENT! The Kingdom of God is near.”

What was he really saying? The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, actually means “*turn, change direction, change behavior.*” In essence, what he was saying was “*TURN from your sins and TURN to God.*” Turning AWAY from in order something to TURN Toward something else.

“To repent means to turn, and then to turn again, and again and again, to God. It is to turn to the kind of life we know we ought to be living. It is to turn to the kind of life we decided we wanted to live the very first time we felt that assurance, that baptism with fire, that presence of Christ, that Holy Spirit, coming into our hearts.” (Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Repentance - important doctrine and part of the Christian faith and life. Not always the easiest to comprehend or practice.

Story about turning away from God

+ Sometimes we choose to TURN away from God.

The prophet’s simple message “REPENT: turn from sin and turn to God” is relevant for us today.

What do we know about John?

Based on Matthew’s gospel, we don’t know very much. John was a fiery prophet with a simple message. “*REPENT. TURN from your sins and TURN to God. Prepare the way of the Lord.*”

We know what his message was and a little about his diet and fashion sense. We know he ate bugs. Locusts and wild honey. And he wore camel’s hair clothing, but don’t get too excited about that!

*“I don’t think he means a soft, lovely men’s camel hair sport coat like you can buy in a fancy department store today. I think he means stinky, rough, dirty cloth crudely woven from the hair of stinky, rough, dirty camels. This fabric was tied to John’s body with a strap of leather. I’m picturing Tarzan, or maybe Fred Flintstone.”* (Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

So, you might say, he wasn’t very fancy or sophisticated. He was a simple prophet. And he had a simple message. “*Turn from your sins and turn to God.*”

His message was directed to the crowds, but also to the religious leaders. And in some mysterious way, it is directed to us today. We need to hear and heed his words as well. “*Turn from your sins and turn to God.*” Turn from our wicked ways and TURN BACK to God.

Story of Turning Back

+ Sometimes we TURN away from God; we turn to our sinful, wicked ways and we need to TURN BACK to God.

The Gospel writer tells us that John was a simple prophet with a simple message.  
*“Repent! Turn from your sins and turn to God. Prepare the way of the Lord. Make His paths straight.”*

This simple prophet somehow drew a crowd.

We read that people from all over the area came to see John. They came to check him out. “Confessing their sin,” Matthew writes, “they were baptized by John.”

Now, not all those who came to the Jordan had pure hearts and motives. There were some others who came as well.

Matthew tells us that “when John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees, that he denounced them.” He confronted them.

But who were the Pharisees and Sadducees?

“The **Pharisees** were perhaps the largest “party” within first-century Judaism. Their primary influence was through the synagogues scattered throughout the region, and their primary concerns were about how to live a holy life based on prayer and God’s requirements revealed in Torah, prophets, and writings. You might say, for them, God’s holiness was most known in how people lived their lives day by day.

“(because of) Their close association with the synagogues, (and they way Judaism) spread, (they were quite) powerful and (had) widespread influence.

“The **Sadducees** were located primarily in Jerusalem and functioned as the guardians of the ritual and worship of the temple. They also cared about holiness, but for them the heart of holiness was found in adherence to Torah above later writings and ensuring the ritual was offered with the purity Torah demanded.

“For the Sadducees, God’s holiness was most known and in its highest form in right worship. (Because of) their association with the temple and their relationship with Rome — (the Sadducees had much) power and influence.

“Theologically, they (were) much more conservative than the Pharisees, as they (strictly followed the) Torah. (Basically), they denied (anything not found in the Torah, such as:) resurrection, afterlife, angels and the (presence) of Satan as director of forces of evil.”  
(from “Pharisees and Sadducees ... and Viper-Babies, O My!” by Taylor Burton-Edwards)

So, John addressed both of these religious leaders. But how did he know who he was dealing with?

Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees could be identified by their dress. Pharisees often wore long, blue fringes on their prayer mantles. many of the Sadducees were also priests in the temple, (and so) they often wore temple vestments. (Taylor Burton-Edwards)

And so, they came to John at the Jordan. He knew who they were. They had mixed motives. Impure hearts. Knew they were not there to confess their sins and change their lives.

So, he challenged them. *“You bunch of snakes! Brood of vipers! Bear fruit of repentance. Show by your lives that you are living for God. Don’t just act holy. Bear fruit. Live for God. Live lives worthy of repentance.”*

In other words, he is saying:

*“Turn from your sin, selfishness, pride, personal preferences. Attitude of having it your way. Turn to God.”*

Simple prophet. Simple message. Drew a crowd. Helped Change lives. Challenged religious leaders.

As individuals and as a congregation, we need to take a deeper look at ourselves. How are we preparing for Christ?

IWW do we need to TURN from our sinful ways?

IWW do we need to CHANGE our Behavior?

What attitudes are doing more harm than good?

*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near—*

*Turn back toward God, because heaven is right around the corner.*

*Turn back to God, because the possibility of deep and abiding joy is very near.*

*Turn back toward God, because Christ is coming.*

*Turn back toward God, so you can free yourselves from the false expectations peddled by the media.*

*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!*

What is the kingdom of heaven? it isn’t just the place we go after we leave this earthly life behind. It is the way of living that Jesus came to show us. It is living according to God’s vision for creation. It is living as Jesus lived and taught.

To the extent that we are able to give ourselves over to Jesus, that is the extent to which we enter the kingdom of heaven in this life. And the only way we can abide in it is by turning, and turning, and turning again to Christ. (Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

As we prepare ourselves of the coming of Christ, let us WAIT and WATCH for Christ breaking into our world, and let us TURN from our sins and TURN to God. And prepare for the One who is “much more powerful (and) who will baptize with the Spirit and fire!” Amen.